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Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission



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Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly

February 19, 2023

To the Judicial Proceedings Chair, Vice Chair and Committee:

I thank you for the opportunity to express my support for SB 478, and my gratitude to Sen. Charles Sydnor and the bill co-sponsors for their enthusiasm in championing this worthy effort.

I was introduced to the horrors of racial terror lynching at 14 years old, when a permanent exhibit at The National Great Blacks In Wax Museum in Baltimore first opened in 2001. The visuals of barbarism committed against Black men, women and children, such as the lynchings of Hayes and Mary Turner (including their unborn child) were jarring to say the least. It scared me to be surrounded by explicit manifestations of hate in the United States against its own citizens, ones that looked just like me...and it prepared me for the work to come. I never imagined that 18 years later, I would be called to chair the first and only state-level commission of its kind in the U.S., and as a representative of The National Great Blacks In Wax Museum.

As I tell people, this story is not fun nor pleasant. It is not easy to introduce the unaware to the depths of inhumanity perpetrated against families and communities simply because of their existence. But it is the **truth**. It is Maryland's truth, and it is the United States' truth, and neither can no longer ignore the impact it continues to have. Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk acknowledged that in 2019 and because of her fortitude and that of many others, the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC) exists.

For the past 3+ years, the MLTRC has been successful in chronicling the stories of Maryland's 40+ confirmed racial terror lynchings, with foci on reaffirming the humanity of the victims and catalyzing healing for the families and communities most affected by these sadistic acts. Along with the five hearing sessions that have occurred across Maryland so far, from the western region to the Eastern Shore, the MLTRC has uncovered evidence of additional acts of racial terror. Concurrently the MLTRC has been recognized as an exemplar of 21st century restorative practices, and it is an honor that local, state, national and international entities see through the Commission possibilities for genuine truth-telling, healing and justice. Support from the DOJ

For more information on the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, visit
<https://msa.maryland.gov/lynching-truth-reconciliation/>

Bureau of Justice Assistance's Emmett Till Cold Case Investigations and Prosecution Program, and interactions with the Department of the Interior and the White House, are but a few examples the Commission's validation and empowerment among those committed to reconciliation as it should happen **today**.

As the MLTRC continues its work, it seeks a stronger commitment from the legislature that created it. Resources to support the Commission's research capacity is critical, as it is the foundation of all subsequent efforts including the 5+ remaining hearing sessions to conduct across the state. Along with research, the Commission is steadfast in crafting an educational framework that encourages institutions and its instructors to embrace this history for its past and current relevance. Additionally, the Commission intends to continue utilizing its platform to elevate other forms of injustice against People of Color in Maryland and beyond, such as the health disparities that are just as devastating than any noose could ever be. Thus, assistance with strengthening its public profile is essential because the world is listening to what the Commission has to say. Finally, the MLTRC embraces this opportunity to cultivate a new generation of historians, researchers, genealogists and educators, and therefore appeals for resources to support learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students at Maryland's four HBCUs, including Morgan State University for whom I am honored to also represent on the MLTRC.

Time has once again catalyzed a moment that calls for a movement towards meaningful change, and the MLTRC proudly accepts its responsibility within that movement. In the spirit of Maryland's motto, the Commission is dedicated to strong, significant deeds and gentle yet firm words. I thank the committee for its consideration and hope that it will vote favorably in support of SB 478, so that the MLTRC may more strongly continue its contributions to assuring Maryland citizens' unalienable right to not just exist, but *live*.

For Healing, Justice & Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David O. Fakunle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and a distinct flourish at the end.

David O. Fakunle, Ph.D.
Chair, Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission